

VZCZCXRO1534  
OO RUEHFK RUEHKS RUEHNH  
DE RUEHKO #0708/01 0510415  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 200415Z FEB 07  
FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0795  
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 5840  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 1995  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 1921  
RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA PRIORITY 9918  
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA PRIORITY 2374  
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE PRIORITY 3397  
RUEHKS/AMCONSUL SAPPORO PRIORITY 0896  
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHMFIUU/COMUSJAPAN YOKOTA AB JA PRIORITY  
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHMFIUU/DISA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEATRS/TREASURY DEPT WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI PRIORITY 6323

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 TOKYO 000708

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SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S FEBRUARY 16 MEETING WITH KOMEITO  
CHIEF OTA

11. (SBU) Summary. During a February 16 courtesy call with the Ambassador, Komeito Chief Representative Ota:  
-- stated his firm belief in the U.S.-Japan alliance;  
-- expressed appreciation for U.S. efforts to keep abductions on the front burner in dealings with the DPRK;  
-- said he strongly supports the relocation of Futenma;  
-- predicted that Taiwan would occupy a prominent place in upcoming meetings between Prime Minister Abe and Premier Wen;  
-- urged the U.S. to work to improve the everyday lives of Iraqis.  
End summary.

12. (SBU) The Ambassador called on Komeito Chief Representative Akihiro Ota at his Diet offices on February 16, their first meeting since Ota was elected leader of junior coalition partner Komeito in September 2006. Ota told the Ambassador that his recent travels to China and Russia, as well as a meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Li the day before, had made him realize how quickly Asia was moving. This had affirmed his belief that it is urgent for Japan to further strengthen its ties with the United States. In addition to the economic relationship, which he described as Japan's most important, he stressed the need for continued cooperation on North Korea, Iraq, and U.S. force realignment. He also mentioned the importance of continuing to build stronger ties with Australia. The Ambassador acknowledged the important role played by Komeito in Japanese politics.

DPRK  
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13. (SBU) Ota told the Ambassador he was very pleased with the agreement reached in the just concluded round of Six-Party Talks in Beijing, and attributed that success to the relationship of trust between the United States and Japan. He thanked the Ambassador for his own personal support on abductions, as well as for U.S. efforts more generally to keep the world focused on the issue. He noted that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had worked hard to gain support from Europe during his multi-country trip there in

January, just before the bilateral U.S.-DPRK talks in Berlin.

Strong U.S. support had dispelled any concerns that Japan would be left behind in any additional agreements with the DPRK, although he said he still worries about DPRK commitment to implementing the current agreement.

14. (SBU) The Six-Party Talks had made progress on the abduction issue, in addition to denuclearization, the Ambassador assured Ota, and the agreement reached in Beijing was just the beginning. Getting the DPRK to recognize that they have to deal with Japan on the abduction issue was a big step, he added. By reaffirming the September 2005 agreement, the DPRK was bound to deal with both the nuclear issue and humanitarian issues, including abductions, he noted. The Ambassador gave credit to the family of abductee Megumi Yokota for focusing attention on the issue, citing her emotional meeting with President Bush in Washington in 2006. In response to Ota's interest in the future of financial sanctions, the Ambassador explained that the United States was prepared to look at individual financial transactions, but would only consider lifting sanctions on those funds not tainted by illegal transactions.

DPRI

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5, (SBU) Distancing himself from Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma's recent call for flexibility in implementing the agreed-upon plan to relocate Futenma, Ota stressed his belief in the need to implement the original agreement as quickly as possible. He agreed with the Ambassador that the agreement should have been implemented long ago, and should not be renegotiated simply because a new governor has been elected

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in Okinawa. That is why Komeito worked so hard to elect ruling coalition candidate Hirokazu Nakaima to the post last November, he stated. He told the Ambassador that he speaks with Nakaima often and thinks the issue will be resolved favorably. Saying that the people of Okinawa feel closer to Komeito than to any other political party, he promised to "coordinate" his views with residents.

16. (SBU) The Ambassador praised the participation of Komeito members Masao Akamatsu and Shigeki Sato in a recent Embassy-organized trip to Guam for Diet members, saying it was good for them to see the role Guam can play in strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance. The Ambassador stressed that the value of Guam is that it can ease the burden on Okinawa, while still keeping U.S. forces in the theater as a stabilizing factor. At the same time, the two agreed, Okinawa will not lose its strategic importance, as Guam will complement the remaining U.S. forces on Okinawa, not replace them.

China

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17. (SBU) Touching on his meetings with President Hu Jintao and State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan in Beijing in January, and with Foreign Minister Li in Tokyo on February 15, Ota said there was no mention of Yasukuni, but much discussion of Taiwan. He expects Taiwan to be a central focus of discussion during Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to Tokyo in April. Komeito International Bureau Director Hiroshi Takano added that what China fears most before the Beijing Summer Olympics is Taiwan revising its constitution and declaring independence. Takano interpreted China's recent anti-satellite missile test as a stern message to the United States and Japan on Taiwan independence.

18. (SBU) The Ambassador reaffirmed the U.S. policy opposing any change to the status quo between China and Taiwan by violent means, adding that the U.S. does not support efforts by either side to change the status quo unilaterally. He noted that even as U.S. relations with China improve, as

demonstrated by cooperation during the Six-Party Talks, China's ascending power leads to troubling issues, such as an accelerated military buildup and the missile tests. U.S.-China relations work much better when U.S.-Japan relations are strong, he said, and emphasized that improving relations with China does not mean lessening the importance of relations with Japan. The Ambassador applauded Prime Minister Abe's October 2006 summits in Beijing and Seoul, and remarked favorably on Ota's 20-year relationship with President Hu, which dates back to when both were leader of youth organizations in their respective parties.

Iraq  
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19. (SBU) Reflecting on his visit to Iraq shortly before the outbreak of hostilities in 2003, Ota emphasized the need for stability in the daily lives of the Iraqi people. The Ambassador pointed out that it is impossible to achieve social progress when violence is a part of everyday life. He explained that plans for a stronger U.S. presence in Iraq are intended to regain control of the streets and establish a presence in communities. He expressed his deep appreciation for Japan's continued contributions, both through Air Self-Defense Forces support and Maritime Self-Defense Forces refueling operations in the Indian Ocean. He acknowledged the difficulties Japan's ruling coalition must face in gaining support for these activities domestically.

Domestic Politics  
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110. (SBU) Toward the end of the meeting, Ota remarked briefly on Prime Minister Abe's goal of achieving a "beautiful Japan," saying an American friend had told him recently that what he finds beautiful about Japan are things like employment policies that view layoffs as a last resort, universal health insurance, and a community spirit that values people. He said he had passed this story on to Abe at dinner the previous evening, and that Abe had jokingly said he would use these points from now on to explain his policies. SCHIEFFER